



## Food 'Oscar' goes to Yukon River salmon

SEAFOOD.COM NEWS [Fish Factor] By Laine Welch - May 7, 2010 - And the Oscar goes to.... Yukon River salmon! The story of wild Yukon River salmon claimed top honors last week by the James Beard Foundation at a celebrity studded gala in New York City. Founded in 1986, the Foundation celebrates and nurtures America's culinary heritage and diversity.

The award - considered the Oscars of the food world - was in the media TV Show/On Location category as part of a PBS series called 'Chefs A' Field.' The segment titled 'King of Alaska' featured nationally acclaimed restaurateur and chef Rick Moonen, and was filmed almost entirely in Emmonak. It was created by Heidi Hanson and Chris Warner of Warner-Hanson Television.

'This wasn't just a set up deal where they put up some back drops. The whole crew spent a week with the people on the lower Yukon,' said Jack Schultheis, general manager of Kwik'pak Seafoods in Emmonak who helped coordinate the project.

The television segment was prompted by Moonen's interest in learning more about the culture and the people who produce what he calls the 'monarch of all fish.'

'I have yet to find something that has topped it in my life. It is the best fish I ever ate,' Moonen says in the TV trailer, which features him and Emmonak fishermen catching and then cooking Yukon chum salmon.

Despite fishing closures for king salmon, Kwik'pak fishermen have been able to keep their high end markets happy with Yukon chums.

'We've been very fortunate with our chum salmon. It has been very well received and we have enough to keep our Yukon fish out on the market,' Schultheis said.

'The Yukon is a very powerful brand - of all the rivers to be on, it has helped raise the value of our fishery and we are very fortunate. Plus, we are able to say that it is the most nutritious salmon in the world.'

In order to back up that claim, Kwik'Pak last year partnered with federal and independent testing labs to sample 35 fish from different salmon runs. The fat content averaged 16 percent, and the omega 3 oils topped four percent per 100 grams, three to four times higher than any other fish in the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture database.

'I was shocked,' said Dr. Evette Hackman, a nutritionist who reviewed the results for Kwik'pak. 'I contacted the lab to make sure there hadn't been a mistake.'

The reason the fat and omega levels are so high is because Yukon salmon must fuel a swim of more than 2,000 miles upriver to spawn, compared to five to 20 miles for other chums.

And to make sure their customers are getting the real deal, Kwik'Pak uses a trace registry that puts a number on packaging to verify the authenticity of all Yukon salmon.

'You would need to eat three servings of other salmon, or take 10 fish oil capsules to equal a six ounce portion of Yukon chum. It's a very good marketing tool for us,' Schultheis said.

Although they were invited, no one from Emmonak attended last week's Food Oscars in the Big Apple. 'Everyone is hunting spring birds and getting ready for break up. It is a very busy time of year out there,' Schultheis said as he was leaving Anchorage for the Yukon River, where he'll remain through the fall.

Meanwhile, Kwik'pak fishermen are trying to establish a fishery for fresh water cisco, they are the only ones in North America who harvest and market lamprey eels, and they would like to get an ok from the state to start developing a lucrative sheefish fishery.